

“Ariyar” in the Ancient Tamil Literature

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1. Introduction: Ever since the advent of “Ariyar” in Indian history, the word “Aryan” has assumed significance and far-fetched linguistic and racial connotations. Then came, the advent of “Dravidians”. Caldwell’s linguistic invention was given a racial twist by the westerners and Indian scholars, though the concept of race and language are two separate entities. Leaving these hypotheses and theories aside, an attempt is made in this paper to study the word “Ariyar” as found in the ancient Tamil literature, popularly known as Tamil Sangam literature. In the process of understanding the past, there have been persistent and insistent attempts in historiography to import later day ideas, concepts and theories to reflect back on the past events leading to diversified and contradicting situation. But, here the approach has been restricted to get the meaning of the word “Ariyar,” as found in the ancient Tamil literature.

2. In the ancient Tamil literature, the word “Ariyar”, “Ariyan”, “Ariya” etc., found in various places with their other forms and have been used both as nouns and adjectives. As in recent times, diametrically opposite views have been expressed¹ about the inclusion of the Tamil epics *Cilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai* within the ambit of Sangam literature, the discussion is restricted to *Ettutogai* (the eight anthologies), *Pattupattu* (the Ten poems) and *Padinen Kizh Kanakku* (the Eighteen Minor works). Now, let us see, what these poems say about “Ariyar”. Of course, there have been scholars, who even do not accept the *Padinen Kizh Kanakku* to bring within the purview of “Sangam literature.” The list of Tamil primary sources, based on which, the paper has been prepared, has been appended.

3. Natrinai: It is the heading the list of Ettuttogai and its general theme is love. The word “Ariyar” appears in the 170th poem, sung by an unknown poet. The companion of the heroin of the poem wants that the hero might be seduced by the beautiful lonely dancing girl. She compares the victory of the Virali (the dancer), who came to a festival clad in a leaf-garment, over her group to the fact that the famous town of Mullur, the “Ariya” soldiers swarmed, but ran away before the lance-battalion of Malayan (a Cheran), who unsheathed a shining sword and attacked with his large army. From this, we can see that the people who came from the north to attack Cheras were known as “Ariyar”.

4. Kuruntogai: Literally meaning ‘a collection of short poems’, it comes next and its theme is also love. The word “Ariyar” appears in the verse 7, line 3. Here, it is described how “Ariyars” dance on a tied rope according to the beatings of a drum. “The forest full of bamboos were rattled the white ripe seeds of shivering *vakai* tree (Sirisa tree) tossed by the wind like the drumming of the “Ariyar” dancing on the rope”. Therefore, here it is evident that “Ariyar” refers to a group of jugglers or tumblers, who performed acrobatics.

5. Paditruppattu (the Ten tens): It gives more information about ‘Ariyar’ in historical setting. The entire extant collection of poems with the deeds and exploits of the Chera Kings. The first and tenth Tens are not available. In the Second Ten, the Patigam (Preface) describes how Imayavaramban Nedunjeradaladhan engraved his royal sign ‘bow’, which figures on his flag, on the top of the Himalayas (lines 4-7). Having roaring oceans has his boundaries (*imizh kadal velittamizhagam*), he ruled Tamizhagam (the Tamil country) in such a way to excel the other nadus (countries). He made ‘Ariyar’ bow before him, who were having very great name (fame and heritage).

5.1. In the Second Ten, the 11th verse details as to how the very famous Himalayas abound with “Ariyas”. Hence, scholars give two different meanings for the ‘Ariyar’:

1. ‘Ariyar’ = Munivar (rishis) and
2. “Ariyar” = ‘Ariya mannar’ (Aryan kings) .

The hillside was resplendent with densely and well grown trees of ***erthrina indica*** (mullu murukka), a kind of citrus and the yak sleeping there would dream of waterfalls and sweet smelling grass. The Himalayas with such fertility was filled with many rishis. In between the Himalayas (in the north) and Kumari in the South, there were Kings who boasted their valour but they were conquered by Nedunjeradaladhan. The meaning is thus rendered, “You quelled the valour of those who called themselves monarchs of the land between Camorin in the South and the famous Himalayas, where the Ariyas² abound and yak sleeps on the hills covered thick with the Oleander and dreams of the broad mountain stream and the narandam (lemon-grass?)”

5.2. In fifth Ten, the patigam mentions ‘***vadavar***’, i.e, the people of north and ‘Ariya Annal’ i.e, head of Ariya Kings. It describes how the kings of the north were afraid of *Kadal Prakkottiya Senguttuvan* [Senguttuvan, a Chera King who had a navy that sailed on the ocean]. He marched with his army to bring a good stone for chiseling an image of the goddess of chastity. He came across a head or chief of Ariya Kings, while passing through forests, and defeated him. Then, he brought a stone and washed it in waters of the Ganges. While coming back, he stayed at *Irumbil*, destroyed *Viyaur* and *Kodungur*. He also killed a king named *Pazhaiyon*.

5.3. In the same fifth Ten, the 43rd verse mentions the defeat of kings who were ruling between the Himalayas in the north and Kumari in the south as boundaries. However, the names of the kings or the countries thus defeated are not given in the poem. In the padigam, the kings are mentioned as the ‘*vadavar*’ (the Kings of north), the Chiefs of ‘Ariyar’ are called ‘*Ariya Annal*’, but here they are generally mentioned as ‘*Ariya arasar*’, i.e, the Kings between the Himalayas and Kumari.

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5.4. Seventh Ten, the 68th poem narrates how the people who were living in the north or northern direction, were leading a fearless, peace and happy life. The expression used to denote them is ‘*vadapula vazhnar*’.

5.5. So from the description of Paditruppattu, we can see that ‘Ariyar’ are –

- ⇒ ‘the Kings of the north’,
- ⇒ ‘Rishis of the Himalayas’,
- ⇒ ‘the Kings between the boundaries of Himalayas and Kumari’ and
- ⇒ ‘the people of the north or northern direction of Tamilagam’.

6. Agananuru (or Neduntogai): It also gives more details about ‘Ariyar’. ‘Ariyars’ capture elephants by the use of trained female elephants. A public woman takes a vow that she would chain her hero with her hair just as the ‘Ariyar’ make the wild elephant domesticated with the she-elephant. Mullaippattu throws light on their employment by the kings of Tamilagam to train elephants.

6.1. In another poem, a harlot wishes her bangles may be broken just like the army of ‘Ariyars’, which was defeated by the Kurumba bowmen who fought under the Cholas, with their shower of arrows, victorious spears and the black buckler. Here, also the names of the defeated ‘Ariyars’ are not given, but it is mentioned that they were defeated at Vallam (Tanjore).

6.2. Paranar³ in his poem eulogises Senguttuvan that he attacked the Aryar so as to make them scream, carved his emblem bow on the very famous mountain and chained the ferocious Kings. Here one can notice that the name of the mountain is not specified and it is mentioned in singular. As Himalayas are always mentioned in plural to denote a chain of mountains, a doubt arises as to whether the poet actually alludes to the Himalayas or to a certain ‘very famous, ancient and well grown’ mountain situated north of Tamizhagam in those days.

6.3. Agam.386 narrates how an Ariya wrestler was defeated by one Panan. The Ariya wrestler was known as ‘Ariya Porunan’ and Panan was another wrestler, whose state was in the north of Tamizhagam (Agam.325). Panan wrestled with Ariya Porunan and crushed his shoulders and arms, the sight of which made *Kanaiyan*, the commander of Chera army, feel ashamed.

6.4. Agam 398 accounts how rain protects and causes to flourish the region of the tall mountain of Ariyar, where gold is found. In the poem, the heroine’s native place, full of flower groves is compared to the above region of mountain. Here, also the name of the mountain is not mentioned.

6.5. So, according to Agananuru, ‘Ariyar’ were –

- ⇒ the people who captured and trained elephants,

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- ⇒ who got defeated by the Cholas at Vallam,
- ⇒ who were the Kings of the north, conquered and chained by Senguttuvan and
- ⇒ who were in possession of a mountain where gold was available.

As there was a wrestler known as 'Ariya Porunan', the name should imply either that he was an Ariya or he came from the north. But, it should be noted that Panan, who defeated Ariya Porunan and came from a state situated north of Tamizhagam, was not given the prefix of 'Ariya'. Therefore, it is evident that there were Ariya wrestlers, just like Ariya jugglers, tumblers or rope dancers, elephant trainers and trainers in Tamizhagam.

7. Purananuru: In one poem⁴, Kovur Kizhar, a Tamil poet, describes how the kings of north were afraid of Cholan Naklankilli that they were spending their nights without sleep. Marudanila Naganar, another poet⁵ describes how Pandiyan Kudakartattunjiya Maran Vazhudi was having a chariot to wage a fierce war to kill the kings of north (vadapula mannar). Actually, the poet eulogises Maran Vazhudi who is said to have caused 'northern kings to fade'. But, particular given about the names of such northern kings or countries and the place or places where he defeated them in the battles are not at all given. There is a mention⁶ of a type of a sandal paste of 'northern mountain' (*vadakundrattuchandanam*), Agananuru also refers to this⁷. But here also, the name of the northern mountain is not mentioned. Three important point to be noted is, though the expressions '*vadapulattarasar*', '*vadapulamannar*' and '*vadakundram*' are used to denote the kings of the north and northern mountain, the prefix 'Ariyar' is conspicuously missing. Therefore, it is very evident that there were northern kings and northern mountains other than Ariya kings of north and northern mountain of 'Ariyar'.

8. Non-Tamilian people of North: In the case of non-Tamilian people, specific names have been mentioned like Kosar⁸, Moriyar⁹, Nandar¹⁰, Tondaiyar¹¹, and Vadugar¹². Kosars belonged to Tulu country and they were living south of the Vindhya and near the shores of western ocean. Nandar and Moriyar are nothing but the Nandas and the Mauryas of north India. Tondaiyars were found in the forests of Vengadam hills, where elephants were abundant. So they went on expeditions, captured, trained and formed them into a brigade. The trained elephants brought firewood to the Rishis and they ate the food of their country only. From this, we can infer that Tondaiyars were having similar vocation like Ariyars, as far as elephants are concerned. Vadugar were having their lands beyond Vengadam and they spoke a different language. Another point to be noted is that at one place (Puram. 378), the Vadugars are denoted as 'vada vadugar'. The term 'vadugar' connotes that they were from the north and hence the expression 'vada vadugar' is very significant, as it actually denotes 'northern group of northerners'. This can be compared with the expression 'vada Ariyar' and 'vadavariyar' denoting 'northern Ariyar', but such expressions are found in Silappathikaram and not in the Sangam literature taken for discussion. But the important point to be noted is the usage of 'Ariyar', while the word 'Ariyar' is

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generally used to denote the people of north or the kings of north, the above mentioned words Kosar, Nandar, Moriyar, Tondaiyar and Vadugar are used to denote only particular groups of people who lived in the north of Tamizhagam.

9. Arya and Ariya suffixes and prefixes: Epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidences are abundant to show that the Sathavahanas were ruling in the north of Tamizhagam with their intruding territories extended up to Caddalore. The important point which should be mentioned here is that the 'Arya' endings in the names of the donees are found only in the grants coming from the territory immediately south of river Krishna (The Kondamudi, the Mayadavolu, the Hira Hadagalli, the Kanteru Nandivarman I and the Mattapad grants). 'Arya' (venerable) as honorific prefix to the names of Buddhist and Jain teachers and saints occurs in inscriptions all over India. Indeed the Tamil epic Manimekhalai mentions Buddha as 'Ariyan' (25-6). 'Arya' as an honorific title is found in the Hathigumpa inscription of Kharavela¹³. 'Arya' as initial part of personal names occur in Junnar inscription inscription¹⁴ (Ayama), and in the Nagarjunakonda inscription¹⁵ (Ayakotosiri) and Ayasiri, names of royal ladies. 'Aryadeva' is the name of the celebrated disciple¹⁶ of Nagarjuna (3rd cent. CE), who spent a greater part of his life in Andhradesha. But the earliest inscription to exhibit names with Arya-ending is the Kondamudi grant of Jayavarman (3rd cent.CE), where all donees have names ending with 'aja', as also found in the same manner in the Mayadavola and Mattapad grants.

9.1. 'Aja' is another form of Prakrit 'Arya', Sanskrit 'Arya' and Tamil 'Ayya', 'Iyya', 'Iyer' and 'Ariyar'. 'Ariyar' or 'Ariya' started as an honorific prefix and become a name-ending much the same way as 'sri' found in many inscriptions. And we can find the same trend in Tamil literature, as in '*Ariya Annal*' (Head or chief of Ariya Kings), '*Ariya Porunan*' (Arya wrestler), '*Ariya Arasan Bragadattan*'¹⁷ (Ariya king named Bragadattan) and '*Ariya Arasan Yazh Brahmadattan*'¹⁸ (Ariya king poet Brahmadattan). The word 'Ayyar' or 'Iyer' is found in many places in ancient Tamil literature including Tolkappiyam¹⁹, which is considered as the oldest extant Tamil work. It is used to represent a teacher, brother, priest, saint, andanan (Brahmana), superior, master or king, with veneration.

10. 'Ariake': A reference to Periplus' 'Ariaca' and Ptolemy's 'Ariake' has to be made, as it has direct bearing on the discussion of 'Ariyar' of the ancient Tamil literature. About the name 'Ariaca' of the Periplus, W. H. Scoville opines: "the word in the text is very uncertain". Lassen thinks that the name Sanskrit 'Latika' (pronounced Larica) and included the land on both sides of the gulf of Cambay²⁰. Ptolemy (c.140 CE) calls the first province of Tamil country going down from the north as 'Lymyrice or Dymirike'. He and the author of Periplus use it only as the name of the Chera territory. The country north of it was to them 'Ariake', belonging to the Aryas, in the restricted sense of Marathas. Taking the other forms 'Ariake Sadinon' and 'Ariake of the Pirates', they could easily have made out that 'Ariake' referred to the country later known as the Maharastra, then ruled over by the Satavahana kings of the Andhra dynasty²¹. Therefore, it is

evident that Ariake or Aricca denotes 'Ariyakam' or the country of Ariyar who were ruling or living immediately north of Dymirike or Tamizhagam.

11. Himalayas of Ariyar: We have seen how some Tamil kings marched towards the Himalayas to bring stones or to defeat the kings in between the 'Himalayas' and 'Kumari', and inscribed their royal emblems on it. Already it has been pointed out that the poets considered 'Himalayas' as single Tall Mountain. From various expressions like 'very famous, ancient and well grown' mountain (Agam.396), 'tall mountain with gold' (Agam.398), 'a big stone' (Puram.171) and a 'tall mountain' (Puram.61), even without naming the mountain, it is evident that the poets considered 'Imaiyam' or 'Imayam' was a single mountain situated north of Tamizhagam. 'Imam' means snow, that is why, the Himalayas are called so. But, in the Tamil literature, wherever the name 'Imayam' is not mentioned, it is also not mentioned that the 'tall, ancient, very famous and stony' mountain with gold is covered with snow. Everybody knows that Himalayas are indeed very famous, ancient and 'several series of more or less parallel or converging ranges'. Also the poets have not given the details how the kings climbed up the 'Himalayas', cut the required stone, brought it down, etc., except that 'he washed it in the waters of Ganges'. Therefore, it is evident that whenever the name 'Imayam' is not mentioned, we have to take it as a mountain that was situated in the north of Tamizhagam.

12. Non-Tamil kings of north: The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela, a king of Kalinga and a contemporary of the third or fifth king of the Satavahana line, is the only epigraphic reference to the kingdoms of the Tamil country after the Asoka inscription. Kharavela ruled Kalinga in the first half of the second century BCE and in the eleventh year of his reign (c.155 BCE), he is said to have destroyed a confederacy of Tamil states – **Tramiradesa sanghatanam** [(T(r)mira, Damira or Tamila] – which was 113 years old (113+17) at the time and had been a source of danger²². The Satavahanas were ruling, starting with the first king Simukha around 230 BCE, in the north of Tamizhagam with the lineage of Kanha (c.207-189 BCE), Sri Satakarni I, Satakarni II (c.166), Hala (c. 20-24 CE), Sri Yajna Satakarni (c.170-199) and others. Before that, the Asokan Empire was extending up to Sravanabelagola covering the areas of the Cholas. He died in 232 BCE and his successor Brihadratha was killed by Pushyamitra Sunga in 185 BCE. The Sunga dynasty continued up to 73 BCE. Therefore, during the reign of these kings of north, no Tamil king could have crossed over to Ganges or Himalayas without encountering them. If the Tamil kings would have actually defeated or conquered the kings of north, as mentioned in the Tamil literature, definitely, there would be some cross reference in their description. But, unfortunately no such reference has been pointed out so far. Moreover, a careful study of ancient Tamil literature clearly shows that the geography of Tamizhagam is restricted between Vengadam in the north and Kumari in the south. This has been repeatedly mentioned by the poets and the later commentators. Therefore, if any Tamil king had conquered or defeated any Aryan king or king of north, he might have defeated an Andhra king of his time.

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13. ‘Ariyar’ denotes what? From the foregoing discussion about the word ‘Ariyar’ and its forms mentioned in the ancient Tamil literature, it is evident that they would come under the following categories:

‘Ariyar’ are –

1. the people who were living immediately north of Tamizhagam or Vengadam.
2. the kings who were ruling immediately north of Tamizhagam or Vengadam.
3. the jugglers, tumblers, rope-dancers or acrobats of Tamizhagam.
4. the Rishis or saints of northern mountain of Tamizhagam or Himalayas.
5. the elephant captors and / or trainers.
6. the groups or kings who waged wars against Tamil kings or chiefs coming from north.
7.]the honorific title ‘Ariya’ was used to respect certain professionals like wrestlers, poets or king-cum-poets of Tamizhagam.

14. Were the ‘Ariyar’ foreigners? A reference has already been made about non-Tamil people coming from the north of Tamizhagam, who were specifically mentioned as *Kosar*, *Moriyar*, *Nandar*, *Tondaiyar* and *Vadugar*. There have been many specific references to Romans and Greeks collectively called as ‘*yavanar*’ by the Tamilians. Their habits, dress, behaviour etc., are clearly described and explained to show that they were foreigners. The word ‘*milechar*’ is specifically found in ***Mullaippattu***; “Within the elegant well-lit inner apartment, adorned with tiger-chains of skilled workmanship, well clad dumb *milechas* (who make themselves understood by signs) attend the king, who spends night absorbed in thought of (coming) battle²³. The mention about the employment of *milechas* as bodyguards is very significant, because unless the king had so much of confidence about his safety, he would not have appointed the foreigners as his bodyguards. And if the ‘Ariyar’ mentioned were actually *milechas* or foreigners, they would have been described and treated differently by the Tamil poets. Though the poets repeatedly mention that the boundaries of this land were Himalayas in the north, Kumari in the south, Kuna kadal (eastern ocean), in the east and Kuda kadal (western ocean) in the west and that ‘Ariyar’ were the people or kings of the north of Tamizhagam, nowhere they have been mentioned that they were foreigners and that they came from outside the boundaries enumerated by them. Except in the references about the encounters between them and Tamilian Kings or chiefs, in all other places, they were treated as the people of Tamizhagam.

14.1 Even in the case of battles among the Tamil kings, chieftains and particularly, Chera, Chola and Pandyas, elaborate details have been given as to how they fought with each other, killed others, destroyed the lands and towns, captured cattle, men and women, collected their booty, seized the crowns and gold (which in turn to be given to the pots) etc. But, surprisingly such details of after-battle exploits and booties are not given in the case of defeat of ‘Ariyar’. So it

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is not known why and how they were spared even after their defeat. Many cases of Sati committed by the wives of killed Tamilian kings and chieftains have been specifically mentioned. Even Imayavaramban Nedunjeraladhan fought a war with the contemporary Chola king, in which both the monarchs lost their lives and their queens performed sati. But, surprisingly, there are no mentions of killing of 'Ariyar' kings and of performing of sati by their queens. In other words, the practices like committing sati, were carried on by the Tamils and not by the so-called "Ariyar". Therefore, really, it is very intriguing as to why and how such benevolent and lenient treatment was given to the defeated, conquered and captured 'Ariyan' kings by the Tamil poets and kings. In any case, it is evident that the 'Ariyar' were not foreigners.

15. Conclusion: In the study of ancient Tamil literature, with a view to find out the meaning and position of 'Ariyar' as mentioned in their context, it has been pointed out that 'Ariyar' were the people or kings of north of Tamizhagam and also of Tamizhagam considering the various descriptions of them. Literary evidences of ancient Tamizhagam with other epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidences of contemporary kings of Maurya, Kalinga and Satavahana show that the exploits of Tamil kings were perhaps restricted to the boundaries of the ancient Tamizhagam and the defeat of 'Ariya' or northern king or kings refers to the defeat of Andhra king or kings. The word 'Ariya' was also used as an honorific title to certain professionals, besides the generic usage to denote the people of the land with the boundaries of Himalayas. As the names Kosar, Nandar, Moriar, Tondaiyar and Vadugar have been used to indicate individual groups of north, and the name 'Ariya' is used to denote the people or kings who were living or ruling immediately in the north of Tamizhagam, it is very evident that no racial connotation was given to 'ariyar' by the ancient Tamils.

Notes and References

Ancient Tamil works consulted (Primary sources).

Ettuttogai

1. Natrinai.
2. Kuruntogai.
3. Ingurunuru.
4. Paditruppattu.
5. Paripadal.
6. Kalittogai.
7. Agananuru.
8. Purananuru

Pattuppattu

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1. Tirumurugatruppadai.	6. Maduraikanchi.
2. Porunatruppadai.	7. Nedunalvadai.
3. Sirupanatruppadai.	8. Kurinchippattu.
4. Perumbanatruppadai.	9. Pattinapattu.
5. Mullaippattu.	10. Malaipadukadam.

Padinenkizhkanakku

1. Naladiyar.	10. Tinaimozhi utraimbadu.
2. Porunatruppadai.	11. Tirukkural.
3. Iniyadhu narpadu.	12. Tirikadugam.
4. Inna narpadu.	13. Asarkkovai.
5. kalavazhi narpadu.	14. Pazhamozhi.
6. kar narpadu.	15. Sirupanchamulam.
7. Indhinai Imbadu.	16. Mudumozhikanchi.
8. Indinai Ezhubadu.	17. Eladhi.
9. Tinaimozhi Imbadu.	18. Kainilai.

Others

Tolkappiyam.
Silappadikaram.
Manimekhalai.

1. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, ***A History of South India***, Oxford University Press, Third edition, Madras, p.115. He holds that the Sangam literature is that which belongs to first three or four centuries A. D.,
P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, ***History of Tamils***, Madras, 1929, p.225. He opines that it is absurd to include the two epics in the Sangam literature,
V. Ramachandra Dikshitar, ***Studies in Tamil literature and History***, Luzac & Co., London, 1930, p.26 says that the two epics may be included in the list of Sangam literature.
2. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.503.
3. Agananuru – 396: 16-18.
4. Purananuru – 31.
5. Ibid – 52.
6. Ibid – 378.
7. Agananuru – 340.
8. Agananuru – 15, 90, 113, 196, 216, 251, 262;
Purananuru – 169, 396;

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Kuruntogai – 15, 73.

9. Puram – 175; Agam – 69, 281, 251.
10. Agam-251 (Nandan), 265 (Nandar).
11. Agam-213, Kuruntogai-260, Perumbanatruppadai-450-454.
12. Agam-107, 213, 253, 181, 195, 385, 391; Kuruntogai-11.
13. “Aira maharaja kharavela”.
14. Archaeological Survey of western India, Vol. iv, p.103, No.18.
15. Ins. L. E. T, Vol.xxi.
16. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri has interpreted ‘Ayamani’ as “aryadeva”, Journal of Oriental Research, X-13, 96, ff.
17. Kurinchipatu, Nachinarkkiniyar’s commentary.
18. He has sung the 184th poem of Kuruntogai.
19. Tolkappiyam, III-143.2, 144, 29.
20. Quoted by K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, *The Chronology of the Early Tamils*, University of Madras, Madras, 1932.
21. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.318.
22. K. A. Nilakanda Sastri, op.cit., p.115.
23. J. M. Somasundara Pillai, *A History of Tamil Literature*, Annamalainagar, 1967, p.240.